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AUTHOR Goering, Lois A.
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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted in 1986 to determine the factors that affect attitudes toward women in management in the Minnesota Extension Service. An instrument developed by Ezell and Odewahn (1980) and adapted for use in the Extension Service by Lyday (1985) was used to determine what factors affect attitudes toward women managers. A number of sociodemographic, career experience, organizational, and intervening factors were examined. All professionals in the organization were asked to respond to the mailed survey, with a 76 percent response rate. One of the significant findings was that men with more management training and experience held less favorable attitudes toward women functioning in management than did the women in the organization or the men with less management training and experience. Explanation for this finding may lie in the training itself, but it is more likely to be a characteristic of the type of men who seek management training. Such men may aspire to higher-level management roles and in the past would have expected to fill these positions; however, they may see women as blocking their advancement to those positions. Theory about attitude formation and attitude change can be useful in structuring training that would be most effective. In applying attitude theories, it would be helpful to ask questions about how training has been conducted. Positive attitudes toward women should be conveyed throughout all training programs, and training should not be treated as an "attitude change" session. Teaching techniques could include actively involving persons in the learning situation, making a public commitment to a particular viewpoint, and writing journals. (KC)

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EFFECT OF TRAINING ON ATTITUDES TOWARD WOMEN MANAGERS

by

Lois A. Goering
Program Leader, Home Economics and
Assistant Professor

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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Introduction

Attitudes toward women in management. Where are we today? In many organizations women are more frequently a part of management than was true a few years ago. Are they well accepted in management or are attitudes toward them negative?

Research results are mixed as we examine recent studies. Studies in public education settings recently have shown teachers to have positive attitudes toward women as managers. (Waldo, 1983) Riggins (1984), however, discovered a statistical difference between the attitudes of female and male teachers. The female teachers were more positive toward women administrators than were the male teachers. Superintendents in a small study exhibited 29 unfavorable beliefs and 11 favorable beliefs about women administrators. Such a pattern of beliefs can cause subconscious discrimination against women seeking top level positions in educational administration. (Ott, 1983) Tuggle (1984) found equally qualified male and female applicants for a vocational education administration position were scored differently by administrators using a standard employment rating scale which contained items typically seen as stereotypically biased against women. Lyday (1985) found that female extension workers held more favorable attitudes toward women managers than did the male workers.

Studies outside of public education show similar results. A study of attitudes of hospital administrators toward women managers indicated a significant relationship between the strength of attitude toward women in management and the sex of the respondent. (Schmude, 1983)

Research Study

In 1986, a study of factors that affect attitudes toward women in management in the Minnesota Extension Service was completed. This organization has had women in management positions since 1917, but in very limited numbers, and until 1972, only in program responsibilities dealing exclusively with what were largely considered womens' programs, the home economics programs. In 1972, the first woman was appointed to a District Director position. In this position she dealt with staff in all program areas and had administrative responsibilities such as budget and personnel. Since then

there have been women involved in County Director, District Director, Assistant Director and Associate Director positions as well as in unit head or assistant unit head positions in support units such as the conference planning group, communications resources, computer applications and human resource development. Currently the Extension Executive Council has two women in the group of seven top administrators. In the next level of management, two of the seven individuals are women. More dramatic changes have occurred in County Extension Director positions. The first woman was appointed as a County Extension Director in 1976. Currently 23 women are in County Extension Director positions and another four are in Acting County Extension Director positions. This is 30 percent of the 89 County Extension Director positions that are filled by women. They are unevenly distributed around the state, but are located in all of the administrative districts.

In conducting the study of factors affecting attitudes toward women managers, a number of socio-demographic, career experience and organizational factors were examined which could potentially be found to affect attitudes toward women in management. Socio-demographic factors examined were age, gender, educational level, marital status, number of young and grown-up children, employment of spouse and employment history of mother. Career experience factors examined were professional field, other extension positions previously held, management training and experience, years of employment outside of extension and the positions held outside of extension. Organizational factors studied were position, geographical location, number of years in extension, number of years in position, gender of present supervisor, whether ever supervised by a woman, and whether ever a peer of a woman manager.

Intervening factors examined were attributions of ability, task difficulty, effort and luck for the success of women managers and behaviors of professionals related to work commitment, risk taking, stress due to role ambiguity, and rational, cognitive coping skills.

An instrument developed by Ezell and Odewahn (1980) and adapted for use in the extension service by Lyday (1985) was used to determine what factors affect the attitudes toward women managers. All professionals in the organization were asked to respond to the mailed survey. Seventy-six percent returned usable surveys.

One of the significant findings was that men with more management training and experience held less favorable attitudes toward women functioning in management than did the

women in the organization or the men with less management training and experience. These men had been involved in a wide variety of management training within and outside of the organization including credit coursework, inservice education, and workshops. They were in positions at all levels of the organization. This is the finding upon which this presentation will focus.

A Kendall's Tau Correlation Coefficient of -.16 existed between attitude toward women functioning as managers and management training and experience. This is significant at the .05 level. In addition, when a regression model was formed, management training and experience was one of the factors found useful in predicting males' attitudes toward women functioning as managers in the organization. In fact, management training and experience was the first independent variable to enter into the model indicating the strength of it's importance. When management training and experience were combined with the other factors in the regression model, scores on task difficulty, effort and ability attribution scales, gender of supervisor, number and age of children and tenure in position, 46% of males' attitudes could be predicted.

This is not an isolated case. Lyday (1985), using the same instrument in the North Carolina Agricultural Extension Service, also found that men with more management training and experience were less favorable toward women in management.

What does this mean? Does training negatively influence attitudes toward women functioning as managers? It may, depending on how it is planned and conducted, but we also need to look at the finding in light of Kanter's (1977) notion of the effects of organizational opportunity structure on individuals in an organization. Opportunity shapes behavior and attitudes.

The number of management roles in any organization are limited. Men who have experienced more training in management may have sought that training because they aspire to higher level management roles. Thus, when women fill some of the management positions, men, who in the past would have expected to fill those positions, find themselves continuing in the organization in non-management positions or in entry level management positions.

According to Kanter (1977), when people are blocked in opportunity, especially when there is a change in opportunity, attitudes and behavior tend to deteriorate. Hence, the seemingly counterintuitive finding that men with more training and/or experience in management have less

favorable attitudes toward women in management than their male colleagues with less training.

What then are the implications for management training in organizations where women are moving into more and more management roles? As a significant factor correlated with attitude toward women functioning as managers, training would appear to be one factor that could be altered to effect a change in attitude.

A search of the literature to determine educational interventions to improve attitudes of people toward women managers did not surface journal articles or other research reports dealing directly with the topic. In lieu of specific research on the topic, what do we know about attitude formation and change that would help to structure that training to be most effective?

Attitude Formation and Change Theory

Attitude formation and change are complex processes. Oskamp (1977) tells us that the most fundamental way that attitudes are formed is through direct experience. All thought and behavior have multiple causes. The multiple causation theory of attitude formation indicates that combined action of causal factors is governed by a general principle of information integration. (Anderson, 1981)

Attitude change involves a shifting of the form of the relationship between the individual and the attitude object. (Palmerino, et. al. 1984) In planning for training intended, at least in part, to result in changed attitudes, it is important to examine the many theories of attitude change.

The functional theories of attitude change stress that attitudes cannot be adequately understood or changed without thinking about the needs that the particular attitudes serve for the individual. (Oskamp, 1977,p. 219) Katz (1960, p. 192) identified four major functions which attitudes serve.

- Some attitudes help us to understand the world and make sense of what is happening around us. They provide meaning to the individual.
- Attitudes can be useful in helping us satisfy needs or reach goals. They help us to adjust to life situations.
- Attitudes can be used to defend our egos. They enhance self esteem and protect us against internal conflicts and external dangers.

- Attitudes can be a way of expressing values, maintaining self identity and enhancing self expression. (Oskamp, 1977, pp. 176)

As we examine needs that negative attitudes toward women functioning in management may serve for males in the organization, especially those with more management training and experience, they likely fall into two categories: need satisfaction and ego defense. The need may be a goal of the organization to maintain the traditional male dominance of the organization or to serve as a mentor for an aspiring young male as he was mentored in the past. Until those needs are changed, attitude change is difficult to achieve.

Cognitive dissonance theory indicates that attitudes change when knowledge, information and attitude are not consistent. Individuals will work to integrate knowledge, information and attitudes and depending on new information, may change their attitude. Perceptual approaches view attitude change as a change in the individual's perception of the attitude object rather than a change in beliefs. (Oskamp, 1977, p. 209)

Palmerino (1984) suggests a useful approach to attitude change theories is to view them as mindless or mindful. This perspective on attitude change combines many attitude change theories to explain why behavior and attitude are or are not consistent. It also suggests ways to cause attitude change.

In mindless functioning an individual deals with an already constructed environment and reacts to stimuli by taking predetermined action without thinking. Classical conditioning and operant conditioning would be examples of mindless approaches to attitude change. The principle behind these theories is that behavior is determined by its consequences and people will continue to behave in ways that give them positive reinforcement. These theories would cause us to reprogram people to react automatically in a new way in order to change attitudes. This might be done by punishing them for exhibiting certain attitudes or behaviors. Other approaches to changing attitudes following mindless approaches include one-sided arguments, repetition, distraction effects (so they don't develop counter-arguments) and having them assume a passive audience role. Mindless functioning results in consistency between attitude and behavior because the person reacts in a routine manner and does not change behavior due to the environment.

Mindful functioning actively involves the individual in considering the unique features of the situation. The individual's attitude toward an object, person or issue may vary based on the situation. Causing people to think and analyze the context will often lead to attitude change.

This mindful functioning is more likely to appear inconsistent because unique features of the context are considered actively and cause variation in attitude.

Cognitive dissonance theory, expectancy-value theories, attribution theories, identification theory and social judgement theories are mindful theories. In applying cognitive dissonance theory, individuals are presented with stimulation which encourages them to persuade themselves. (Koballa, 1984) Identification theory involves identification with a character in a simulation in working to change attitudes. It incorporates principles of incentive and dissonance theory. (Williams, et. al., 1986) Autotelic inquiry involves learning by experiencing the consequences of your own actions through simulation. (Dye, 1980)

Persuasive communication theory indicates that attitudes can be changed by systematically designing a setting with a credible communicator and a "virile" message. Characteristics of the communicator are very important. Highly credible sources change attitudes through a process of internalization. The individual integrates the new attitude into his or her belief and value system. Attractive communicators change attitudes through identification as individuals attempt to establish a relationship with the communicator. Powerful communicators change attitudes through compliance. When a powerful communicator attempts to change attitudes, people may publicly adopt the attitude without privately accepting it. The perception of similarity to the communicator affects persuasion by increasing the attractiveness or credibility of the communicator. (Hass, 1981) Repetition is important in changing attitude, but effects of persuasion are greater when the stimuli are varied than when each presentation uses identical stimuli. (Sawyer, 1981, p. 260)

Implications for Management Training

In applying these attitude theories, it is important to examine the management training that has been offered in the organization. Questions which an organization would do well to consider are:

> Have trainers used language or examples that have reflected negatively on women managers?
>
> Have women as well as men been portrayed as successful managers?

Has language been used in group interactions by those men and women being trained that reflected negatively on women managers?

Have successful women managers been involved in assisting with the training being offered to current or prospective managers, whether men or women?

Has training been equally available to men and women or is reverse discrimination taking place?

Has training helped the organization's members understand some of the inevitable dynamics associated with the introduction of any new group into the management class?

Attitude change is a process that takes time. One educational activity is not likely to cause major attitude change among the target audience. It may actually take a change in the organizational culture to change attitudes. Applying the mindful theories of attitude change would appear to be the most useful in changing attitudes toward women functioning as managers. What do those theories and adult education principles tell us that will be helpful?

Focus/Content

Planning training that focuses on attitude alone is not likely to be the most productive approach to attitude change. It is more appropriate for attitude change to be an underlying thread in all management training and for the trainers to consciously think about the organizational culture and creating positive attitudes among all managers as they plan any training to be offered to managers or potential managers.

Focusing the training on management principles and competencies will be helpful in changing attitudes. Helping new and prospective managers to gain knowledge and skills needed in management will improve attitudes as the individuals in management positions handle their work in a competent manner. The Minnesota Extension Service has had extensive training in management competencies needed at the County Director, District Director and higher administrative levels for those individuals currently in those roles and for people aspiring to become County Directors. The results of the training, which was not focused on attitude change, changed attitudes as those male and female managers functioned on the job.

Use of Women Managers as Trainers

Involving competent men and women managers in the training program as panel members or as program presenters also assists in improving attitudes toward women managers. Involving a mixed team of men and women trainers in a manner that involves women taking the lead role in part of the training and the men taking the lead role in other aspects of the training can model effective work relationships that could lead to more positive attitudes.

Persuasive communication theory indicates that attractive, credible instructors who have a good relationship with the managers being trained will be more successful in promoting attitude change than will people without those characteristics. They will also be more effective than a powerful communicator such as the University President, company Chief Executive Officer, or similar individuals.

Teaching Techniques

Actively involving individuals in the learning situation in a variety of ways is helpful in attitude change. The use of case studies, group discussion, panels, simulations, games, etc. which illustrate both men and women as competent managers and which help individuals to deal with their emotional reaction to women managers can assist in changing attitudes. Case studies, simulations and discussion questions must focus as much as possible on realistic situations in the organization or in an organization with a similar mission and overall structure. Examples from industry would not be as helpful in an educational organization as they would be in an industrial organization.

According to dissonance theory, one of the mindful theories, two techniques which should have an effect on attitude are:

- making a public commitment to a particular viewpoint
- active participation in stating persuasive arguments.

As people prepare arguments against their own position, they are stimulated into open-minded and unbiased evaluation of what to them is controversial information. (Oskamp, 1977, p. 206-207)

How can we develop these techniques for management training? Use of debate in a training meeting can work well. Develop a series of statements or situations for which groups (debate teams) must develop arguments. Having each group debate both sides of the argument in front of the larger group will cause

them to think through the evidence they have on both sides and to state it publicly.

Another technique, also based on dissonance theory, is the writing of journals to capture insights. As managers complete training, especially that where the debate technique was used or where a particularly competent woman manager was involved in presenting information, encouraging them to do journaling over the next week or month recording their feelings about the training experience can assist them in clarifying their feelings and persuading themselves to change their attitudes. To extend the classroom to the workplace, also record their feelings and observations about managers with whom they are in contact over that time period. Journals are personal and should not be collected for inspection.

Summary

Attitudes are complex. Attitudes towards women functioning as managers are improving, but continue to be a concern. To change those attitudes is not an easy nor a one activity process. To successfully change attitudes, techniques which involve individuals in the learning process, especially those techniques which involve individuals in persuading themselves will be most successful.

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